

## MAJOR LOCAL EFFORT TO PROVIDE HEALTH CARE TO THE UNINSURED

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### Introduction

Houston and Harris county are witnessing a major private-public collaboration that is committed to finding the answer to the continuing problem of no health care coverage for 1.1 million residents of our area. Supported by Harris County, Mayor Bill White, the Houston Partnership, and major private hospitals, the new and unprecedented Harris County Public Health System Council's goal is to establish a "medical home" for all uninsured residents of Harris County. Initial action steps have resulted in five new Federally Qualified Health Clinics for the area.

### Reports

Formation of the Harris County Public Health System Council in January 2005 was the direct result of two major studies conducted in 2004 and 2005: The Lewin Report examined overcrowding in the emergency rooms and proposed a reorganization of the public health system and the development of up to 30 new clinics to serve county residents. A second study sponsored by the Houston Partnership seconded many of Lewin's recommendations and further proposed...

### The Council

The new Council received a mandate: Harris County will seek to develop and maintain a comprehensive, coordinated, and evolving health care delivery system. The system should provide necessary population-based public health interventions and access to a network of preventive and primary care services with particular emphasis on care for persons who have little or no medical insurance coverage. The system should, on a continuing basis, provide available and responsive trauma and emergency care for persons who are in need of such services.

### Membership

A 21-member Council was appointed by Harris County Commissioner's Court that included representation from the following: UT-Houston School of Public Health, UT-Health Science Center at Houston, Baylor College of Medicine, Harris County Medical Society, Houston Medical Forum, Save Our ERs Coalition, Greater Houston Partnership, Harris County Hospital District Board, Harris County MHMRA, Memorial Hermann Healthcare, System, Gateway to Care, Healthcare for the Homeless Houston, Health Law and Policy Institute at UH Law Center, Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans, Asian American Health Coalition, and representatives of the following elected officials: County Judge, Commissioners Precinct 1-4 and the Mayor of

Houston. Serving as ex-officio members are the chief executive officers of the Harris County Hospital District, MHMRA, Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services, and the Houston department of Health and Human Services.

### Leadership

Elected chair of the Council is Rob Mosbacher of the Greater Houston Partnership's Healthcare Advisory Committee; and vice-chair is Dr. Lewis Foxhall of the Harris County Medical Society.

### Committees

The Council appointed four working committees: Alternative Futures, Behavioral Health, Community Clinics, and Insurance and Finance. The purpose of each committee is as follows:

*Alternative Futures: Elena Marks, Chair. Analyses and reports on population and demographic trends; identification of health care needs in the community; review and measurement of outcomes of current programs; and projection of alternative paths that could be taken to improve and maintain the health care system.*

*Behavioral Health: David Buck, M.D., Chair. Merger of MHMRA and HCHD's psychiatric emergency services; expansion of mobile services; assessment of community mental health care and integration of services with HCHD's community clinics; services for jail inmates; and recommendations for improvements in the use of psychiatric beds at the Harris County Psychiatric Center and the Hospital District.*

*Community Clinics: Merger of some or all of the public health services of the City of Houston with the county's Public Health & Environmental Services Department; transfer of certain medical primary care services from public health departments to the Hospital District; a plan for expansion of community clinic services, including joint use where feasible, school-based clinics, partnerships with private physicians and hospitals, and applications for Federally Qualified Health Care projects; review of medical services for children and juveniles in the county's custody; improvements in non-emergency transportation for safety-net patients to preventive and primary care clinics and specialty and urgent care centers; and review and recommendations for improvements to services for seniors, the disabled, and the homeless who are without adequate financial resources, and for jail inmates, including continuity of care for those inmates who are released from detention and return to the community.*

*Insurance & Finance Dan Wolterman, Chair. Integrated, cooperative financial planning; funding sources for the varied services of the system, including grant, foundation, public, private, and non-profit sources; model projects to demonstrate ways to increase access to health care for the uninsured and working poor; legislative proposals, state and federal, to strengthen capacity and financial resources; and insurance coverage for medical services for the uninsured and underinsured.*

### Web Site

The two seminal reports, committee goals and minutes, a list of the membership, and other documents can be found at the following web site (<http://www.hcphsc.hctx.net/>)

### Meetings for Remainder of Year

All remaining meetings of the Harris County Public Health Care Council in 2005 are open to the public and will be held at the Harris County Medical Society, 15151 Hermann Drive, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., on the following dates: **July 28, August 25, September 29, October 27, November 17, and December 15.**

### **Citizen Participation**

**The Harris County Health Care Council will be producing a comprehensive plan for public health care that will be presented to the public in a variety of forums. Citizens are encouraged to participate in the forums to determine if the placement of clinics and other health services will address the needs of their areas and communities.**